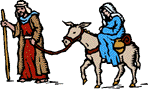
**What Is A Posada?*http://www.multiculturalfest.com/img/anisparkle2_e0.gif***

In Mexico, Christmas is an important holiday season, celebrated with strong, long-standing traditions. The first Christmas celebration took place in 1538 when missionaries brought Roman Catholicism to Mexico. The story of Nacimiento, or Christ's birth, has been celebrated ever since.

One of the most colorful celebrations is the posada. The Posada celebration begins on December 16 with nine days of joyful observance. The ceremony of Las Posadas commemorates the cold and difficult journey of Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem and their search for shelter at an inn before the birth of Jesus. In Spanish, "Posada" means inn, lodging or shelter. Today, the Posada has evolved into a religious and social celebration, paying a festive homage to this journey.

Traditionally, on each of the nine nights before Christmas, a party is held at a home in the neighborhood. At dusk, all guests and neighbors gather outside the house. A small child dressed as an angel leads, followed by children carrying figures of Mary and Joseph.

Everyone participates in the procession, singing the melodious [verses of "Las Posadas"](http://www.multiculturalfest.com/posadaVerses.htm) as they walk slowly along, carrying lit candles. They make three stops, three times requesting lodging and being denied. They return to the original house. Half of the group goes inside and the other half remain outside. Verses alternate back and forth from pilgrims to hosts until the sacred nature of their visit is revealed and they are admitted into the house. The doors open and the joyful pilgrims enter singing. "Enter Holy, Holy Pilgrims..." This ends the religious part of the ceremony and the fun begins.

Everyone enters the person's home who is hosting the party. Merrymaking begins with the breaking of the Piñata, traditionally made in the shape of a star to represent the star that mysteriously guided the Three Kings to the newborn Jesus. Someone, usually a child, is blindfolded, turned around a few times, given a stick and a chance to break it. Children take turns attempting to break the Piñata. When the Piñata is broken, the children scramble for the candy and goodies. There is plenty of food and drink, with candy and fruit for the children.